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Question of Palestine

The situation in the Middle East

Security Council
Fifty-seventh year

Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 56/36 of 3 December 2001 on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. It contains replies received from the President of the Security Council and the concerned parties to notes verbales sent by the Secretary-General pursuant to the request contained in paragraph 9 of the resolution. The report also contains the observations of the Secretary-General on the current state of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on international efforts to revive the peace process with a view to achieving a peaceful solution.

* The present report has been submitted after the established deadline in order to include as much updated information as possible.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 56/36 of 3 December 2001 on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

2. On 8 August 2002, pursuant to the request contained in paragraph 9 of the above-mentioned resolution, the Secretary-General addressed the following letter to the President of the Security Council:

> "I have the honour to refer to resolution 56/36, which the General Assembly adopted on 3 December 2001, at its fifty-sixth session, under the agenda item 'Question of Palestine'.
>
> "Paragraph 9 of the resolution 'requests the Secretary-General to continue his efforts with the parties concerned, and in consultation with the Security Council, for the promotion of peace in the region and to submit progress reports on developments in this matter'.
>
> "In order to fulfil my reporting responsibilities under this resolution, I should be grateful if you would kindly convey to me the views of the Security Council by 30 September 2002."

3. On 30 September 2002 the following reply was received from the Security Council:

> "The members of the Security Council have continued to follow with grave concern the tragic deterioration of the situation in the Middle East. They discussed the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, with growing frequency during this period. Several open debates were held for all Member States to express their views. At the beginning of 2002, Council members agreed to begin regular monthly informal briefings on the situation. The aim was to keep members up to date with developments in the region and to ensure a more regular exchange of views, including with the Secretary-General.
>
> "On 12 March, the Council adopted resolution 1397 (2002), which for the first time affirmed the Council's vision of a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized borders. This resolution, along with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the Arab Peace Initiative, initiated by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and adopted by the Arab Summit in March 2002, have become widely accepted as the foundation for a just, lasting and comprehensive solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Implementation of these concepts, however, has remained fraught with difficulties and plagued by continuing violence on the ground.
>
> "As the violence escalated in early 2002, the Council adopted four resolutions (resolutions 1402 (2002), 1403 (2002), 1405 (2002), and most recently 1435 (2002)) and agreed Presidential Statements in April and July 2002. The Council's principal demands were an immediate ceasefire, withdrawal of Israeli troops from Palestinian cities, including Ramallah, cessation of all acts of violence, including all acts of terror, provocation, incitement and destruction, cooperation with the special envoys of the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the United Nations and the

European Union ('the Quartet') and others and the implementation of the Tenet and Mitchell plans. In its resolution 1403 (2002), the Council demanded the implementation of resolution 1402 (2002) without delay. The Council (in its resolution 1405 (2002)) expressed its concern at the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinian population, in particular reports from the Jenin refugee camp following operations by Israeli forces. It welcomed the initiative of the Secretary-General to develop accurate information on what happened in the Jenin refugee camp through a fact-finding team. However, the Secretary-General had to disband his fact-finding team after less than two weeks in the face of Israeli difficulties with the deployment of the team. Council members regretted that development but continued to support fully the efforts of the Secretary-General in that regard. In its resolution 1435 (2002), the Security Council expressed grave concern at the reoccupation of the headquarters of the President of the Palestinian Authority in the city of Ramallah that took place on 19 September 2002, demanding its immediate end. It also demanded that Israel immediately cease measures in and around Ramallah, including the destruction of the Palestinian civilian and security infrastructure, and demanded the expeditious withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces from Palestinian cities. The Council called on the Palestinian Authority to meet its expressed commitment to ensure that those responsible for terrorist acts are brought to justice by it. In resolution 1435 (2002), the Council condemned all terrorist attacks against any civilians and reiterated the need for respect in all circumstances of international humanitarian law. It also reiterated its demand for the complete cessation of all acts of violence. Finally, the Council expressed its full support for the efforts of the Quartet and called upon the Government of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and all States in the region to cooperate with those efforts, and recognized in that context the continuing importance of the initiative endorsed at the Arab League Beirut Summit."

4. In a note verbale dated 27 June 2002 to the parties concerned, the Secretary-General sought the positions of the Governments of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as that of the Palestine Liberation Organization, regarding any steps taken by them to implement the relevant provisions of the resolution. As at 15 November 2002, the following replies had been received.

Note verbale dated 15 August 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

"As the Secretary-General is aware, Israel voted against this resolution and similar resolutions adopted by the General Assembly in previous sessions. In the light of the urgent need to bring an end to all acts of violence and terrorism in the region and to return to the agreed negotiating process, Israel wishes to put on record, once again, its position on this matter.

"Israel views the aforementioned General Assembly resolution not only as unbalanced, but also as undue interference in matters which the parties have agreed to resolve within the context of direct bilateral negotiations.

"The current violence in the region is a result of a Palestinian decision to abandon peace negotiations and pursue their goals through violence and terrorism. The one-sided approach reflected in the resolution, which seeks to dictate the outcome of the negotiating process, effectively rewards violence at a time when the Palestinian side should be compelled to renounce all acts of violence and terrorism and return to the path of peaceful dialogue."

Note verbale dated 3 October 2002 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

"General Assembly resolution 56/36, which is the main political resolution regarding the question of Palestine, was adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session by an overwhelming majority (131-6-20), reflecting long-established convictions and positions of the international community on this important issue. In resolution 56/36, the Assembly recalls several principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, including, inter alia, the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples and the principle of inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. In the resolution, the Assembly also expresses its full support for the peace process and sets forth the basis for a just settlement of the question of Palestine. Further, the Assembly emphasizes the permanent responsibility of the United Nations with regard to the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects and emphasizes the importance of a more active and expanded role for the Organization in the peace process.

"In addition to the reaffirmation of principles, the General Assembly addresses in resolution 56/36 the serious deterioration of the situation on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and the difficulties facing the Middle East peace process. In this regard, the Assembly expresses its deep concern over the tragic events that have taken place in Occupied East Jerusalem and the Occupied Palestinian Territory since 28 September 2000, resulting in a high number of deaths and injuries, mostly among Palestinian civilians. Deep concern is also expressed over the continued imposition of closures and restrictions by Israel on the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the Israeli incursions into Palestinian-controlled areas and actions against Palestinian institutions.

"Furthermore, in resolution 56/36, the General Assembly, inter alia, calls upon the concerned parties, the co-sponsors of the peace process and other interested parties, as well as the entire international community, to exert all efforts and initiatives necessary to immediately reverse all measures taken on the ground since 28 September 2000 and to ensure a speedy resumption of the peace process. Regrettably, the peace process has not resumed as the Israeli side has continued to refuse to adhere to understandings and agreements reached between the two sides and to implement overdue provisions. Moreover, during this time, the Israeli occupying forces have only continued to carry out daily military actions against the Palestinian people and the Palestinian leadership, including against the President of the Palestinian Authority. This Israeli military campaign intensified in particular in March 2002, leading to the reoccupation of Palestinian cities, the destruction of most of the institutions of the Palestinian Authority, and almost a return to the

situation before the peace process. Overwhelmingly, the actions taken by the occupying forces in the course of this bloody military campaign have constituted grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949. Indeed, the Israeli occupying forces have committed countless war crimes, State terrorism and systematic human rights violations against the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. As a result, the situation on the ground has continued to gravely deteriorate.

"The dramatic and tragic decline of the situation since last year has been characterized by an escalation of the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli occupying forces against the Palestinian people, including children, women and men. Throughout this time, the Israeli occupying forces continued to launch attacks in Palestinian cities, towns and refugee camps, using all forms of heavy weaponry, including tanks, helicopter gunships and warplanes. Since 28 September 2000, and as of the date of this note, the Israeli occupying forces have killed more than 1,830 Palestinians. Many of the killings committed in the past year by the occupying forces have been wilful killings and targeted extrajudiciary executions. In addition, more than 35,000 Palestinians have been injured, many critically and many suffering permanent disabilities. The occupying forces have also abducted and detained thousands of Palestinians, particularly males, throughout this period.

"At the same time, the Israeli occupying forces have caused vast destruction to Palestinian homes, land and vital infrastructure. Thousands of homes have been damaged or completely demolished, leaving thousands of Palestinians homeless. Countless agricultural fields have been laid to ruin by the occupying forces and hundreds of thousands of productive trees have been uprooted. Public buildings, facilities and institutions have been destroyed, water and electricity networks have been damaged and disrupted, and hundreds of roads have been bulldozed or razed. In addition, the occupying forces have even inflicted damage on United Nations property, particularly facilities and buildings of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the area. Moreover, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued to impose severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods, including humanitarian and medical aid and personnel, into and out of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This military siege being imposed and the constant, and frequently round-the-clock, curfews have further devastated the difficult socio-economic conditions of the Palestinian people. Indeed, they have caused the total disruption and virtual collapse of the economic, social, health, educational and cultural life of the Palestinian people, who for many months now have been facing a dire humanitarian crisis.

"The actions and measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, have, as noted, violated international humanitarian law and they have also violated relevant resolutions of the United Nations, including those of the Security Council. Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 56/36, the Security Council has adopted five resolutions on the matter, namely resolution 1397 (2002) of 12 March 2002, resolution 1402 (2002) of 30 March 2002, resolution 1403 (2002) of 4 April 2002, resolution 1405 (2002) of 19 April 2002, and resolution 1435 (2002) of 24 September 2002. In addition, the

General Assembly resumed its tenth emergency special session, on illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in December 2001 and in May 2002, adopting three resolutions in total, namely resolutions ES-10/8 and ES-10/9 of 20 December 2001 and ES-10/10 of 7 May 2002. Israel, the occupying Power, has not fully complied with any of those resolutions, further exacerbating the already grave situation.

"The provisions of the above-mentioned resolutions of the Security Council and of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, if complied with and implemented, would, both then and now, have certainly contributed to a calming of the situation on the ground, with many lives saved, as well as to a resumption of peace negotiations between the two sides. In this regard, the Palestinian side has repeatedly expressed its support for those resolutions and expressed readiness to adhere to the provisions of the resolutions. A review of the provisions of the above-mentioned Security Council resolutions is pertinent to illustrate how it is Israeli non-compliance that has prevented the full implementation of those resolutions and has perpetuated the cycle of tragic violence on the ground.

"In resolution 1397 (2002), the Security Council affirmed, for the first time, the Council's vision of a region in which two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized borders. It is important here to note that this resolution, along with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the Arab Peace Initiative initiated by Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah and adopted by the Council of the League of Arab States at its summit held in Beirut in March 2002, have become widely accepted as the basis for a just, lasting and comprehensive solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict, the core of which is the question of Palestine.

"As the violence continued to escalate in late March 2002 and thereafter, the Security Council adopted the other four resolutions mentioned above in addition to issuing two presidential statements in April (S/PRST/2002/9) and July 2002 (S/PRST/2002/20). In resolution 1402 (2002), adopted in response to the reoccupation of Palestinian cities, the Council called for an immediate ceasefire; the withdrawal of Israeli occupying forces from Palestinian cities, including Ramallah; a cessation of all acts of violence; and cooperation with efforts to implement the Tenet security work plan and the Mitchell Committee recommendations. As indicated in our note last year, Israel resisted all efforts to implement those recommendations and even took positions undermining them. In the process, Israel managed to bury the Mitchell recommendations, thus destroying yet another international attempt to end the cycle of violence and to extricate the parties from the current situation. Security Council resolution 1403 (2002) followed, with the Council demanding the implementation without delay of resolution 1402 (2002), which is still without results on the ground. Actually, Israel, the occupying Power, has publicly rejected both resolutions and continues to this date with its reoccupation of Palestinian cities.

"With the continued deterioration of the situation on the ground, and the intensification of attacks by the occupying forces, especially in the Jenin refugee camp in April 2002, the Security Council convened once again and

adopted resolution 1405 (2002), expressing its concern at the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinian population, in particular reports from the Jenin refugee camp of an unknown number of deaths and destruction. The Council also welcomed the initiative of the Secretary-General to develop accurate information regarding the events in the Jenin refugee camp through a fact-finding team. However, the Secretary-General, had to disband the team in the face of Israeli refusal to cooperate with him in the implementation of resolution 1405 (2002). Pursuant to the request made by the General Assembly in its resolution ES-10/10 of 7 May 2002, the Secretary-General presented a report (A/ES-10/186), drawing upon the available resources and information, on the events that had taken place in Jenin and in other Palestinian cities.

"The Palestinian side took the necessary steps in response to the Secretary-General's request to provide information relevant to the implementation of resolution ES-10/10. A detailed Palestinian report was submitted to the Secretary-General to assist in the development of an accurate assessment of the atrocities and serious violations of international law committed by the Israeli occupying forces against the Palestinian people. The Israeli side, however, refused to cooperate with the Secretary-General and submitted no response or information in that regard. Although the Secretary-General did present a report on the matter, the issue has not been closed, as a full investigation was not possible owing to Israel's intransigence. The international community should continue to condemn the atrocities and war crimes committed in the Jenin refugee camp as well as the Israeli prevention of a full investigation, in addition to condemning other Israeli atrocities committed in other Palestinian cities.

"Most recently, in resolution 1435 (2002), the Security Council expressed its grave concern at the reoccupation of the headquarters of the President of the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah that took place in September 2002, demanding its immediate end. It also demanded that Israel immediately cease measures in and around Ramallah, including the destruction of Palestinian civilian and security infrastructure, and demanded as well the expeditious withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces from Palestinian cities. Furthermore, the Council condemned all terrorist attacks against any civilians and reiterated the need to respect international humanitarian law in all circumstances. It also reiterated its demand for the complete cessation of all acts of violence. Finally, in resolution 1435 (2002), the Council expressed its full support for the efforts of the Quartet and called upon the Government of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and all States in the region to cooperate with those efforts. Israel, the occupying Power, as a result of international pressure, has indeed ended its siege of the headquarters of the President of the Palestinian Authority. While that was a step in the right direction, all provisions of the resolution must be implemented.

"The Palestinian side has repeatedly expressed its readiness to cooperate with the efforts of the Quartet and other concerned parties and continues to do so, especially with regard to efforts for the full implementation of resolution 1435 (2002). In general, the efforts of the Quartet must be renewed and intensified in the face of the ongoing decline of the situation on the ground, with the consequent negative impact on the stability and security of the region, and the grave humanitarian crisis being faced by the Palestinian people.

Simultaneously, serious efforts must be undertaken, as stressed in resolution 56/36, towards the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination and the right to establish an independent State. This can only be fully achieved with the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory it has illegally occupied since 1967.

"Palestine expresses its appreciation for the role being played by the United Nations in this regard, including the efforts and important role of the Secretary-General. In particular, Palestine expresses its support for the Secretary-General's calls for the political, security and economic issues to be dealt with in tandem. Palestine stresses the necessity for a comprehensive approach, which would also mean spelling out the form of the final settlement in advance while reaching agreement on specific steps leading to it. In addition, Palestine expresses its strong support for the proposal made by the Secretary-General before the Security Council, on 18 April 2002, for the deployment of a robust and credible multinational force to help end the cycle of violence and establish a secure environment in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, conducive to the resumption of normal economic activity by the Palestinian people, the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian and development assistance and the implementation of prior commitments and agreements between the two sides, thereby creating favourable conditions for the resumption of political negotiations towards a final settlement."

Note verbale dated 23 July 2002 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

"The Syrian Arab Republic has repeatedly affirmed that the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East must be based on the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, namely Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the principle of land for peace which was the basis on which the peace process was launched in Madrid in 1991.

"The Syrian Arab Republic affirms that the case of Palestine is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that it is therefore essential to achieve a just settlement based on the resolutions of the United Nations, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with its capital in Jerusalem, guaranteeing the right of the Palestinian people to return and their right to self-determination on the basis of the principle of the equal rights of peoples, which is one of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and the resolution of the problem of the Palestinian refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948.

"The establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the region requires Israel, the occupying Power, to withdraw from all the Arab territories it occupied in 1967 to the line of 4 June, including Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan, and also from the remaining occupied Lebanese territories, to guarantee the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among them being the right to self-determination and the right to establish an independent State on the soil of its homeland with Jerusalem as its capital.

This requires Israel to cease its hostile and expansionist policies that are subversive of peace and to defer to international legitimacy and renounce its policy of hegemonism, the building of settlements and the confiscation of land, thereby ensuring the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the region."

II. Observations

5. Over the past year, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has deteriorated further, eroding many of the achievements of the peace process. The ongoing cycle of violence and retaliation has further inflamed political tensions and caused a significant death toll on both sides. The international community, united in its support for the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security, has continued to develop initiatives aimed at stopping the violence and bringing the parties back to the negotiating table.

6. Since the outbreak of the intifada at the end of September 2000, more than 1,800 Palestinians have been killed and some 25,000 injured. On the Israeli side, more than 600 people have been killed and over 4,000 injured. I have urged both sides to live up to their obligations under international humanitarian law to ensure the protection of civilians. Illegitimate or illegal means cannot be justified by reference to legitimate objectives — whether they be an end to occupation and statehood for Palestinians or security for Israelis. Beyond the question of legality, surely we need no further reminder of the ultimate futility of the present course than the hundreds of deaths, thousands of injuries and tens of thousands of grieving families and friends of the victims of this conflict. The parties are on a path leading to further pain and suffering — a path that will bring neither closer to achieving its stated goals.

7. The situation reached a particularly dangerous point at the end of March 2002, following a Palestinian suicide bomb attack in the Israeli city of Netanya. After that terrorist attack, which left 28 persons dead and 140 injured, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) launched a massive military operation in the West Bank, leading to the reoccupation of cities under full Palestinian control (Area A). That operation, called "Defensive Shield" by Israel, inflicted severe damage on the Palestinian security and civilian infrastructure and created a humanitarian and human rights crisis. To address the sharpening trend towards greater violence and the attendant consequences for both sides, in April 2002 I proposed the deployment of a multinational force to help provide security for Israeli and Palestinian civilians, and to promote an environment conducive to the resumption of negotiations. This proposal remains on the table.

8. The Israeli incursion into the Jenin refugee camp in April led to allegations of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. Following consultations with, inter alia, members of the Security Council and the Government of Israel, I offered to send an impartial fact-finding team to compile an accurate account of what had occurred. In resolution 1405 (2002), the Security Council unanimously accepted that offer, and I then named a team headed by former President Martti Ahtisaari of Finland. Israel subsequently raised objections to the implementation of resolution 1405 (2002) that were fundamental in nature and which effectively precluded the team's visit to the region. With great regret, I found

it necessary to disband the team. In May 2002, the General Assembly at its resumed emergency special session requested me to submit a report on the events in Jenin and other Palestinian cities on the basis of available resources and information. My report (A/ES-10/186) was issued on 30 July 2002.

9. A particularly worrying trend was the rapid expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including those around East Jerusalem, despite repeated international calls for a freeze on all such activity and an end to land confiscations. These settlements, and the road networks that serve them, are enveloping East Jerusalem, cutting it off from other Palestinian areas in the West Bank, which would be split into two. Other new settlement projects would bisect the northern West Bank and encircle both Bethlehem and Hebron to the south. Such settlement activity is illegal under international law and should be halted.

10. The escalating confrontation has had a devastating impact on the humanitarian and economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Palestinian economy has virtually ceased to function in some areas, owing largely to the Israeli policy of curfews and closures. More and more people are living below the poverty line. In August, I sent Ms. Catherine Bertini to the region, as my Personal Humanitarian Envoy, to review humanitarian needs in the light of recent developments. As Ms. Bertini noted in her report, this is not a "traditional" humanitarian crisis. It is inextricably linked to the conflict and to the measures imposed by Israel in response to terrorist and other attacks: closures, curfews and tight restrictions on the movement of goods and people. On 17 September 2002, the Quartet reviewed the recommendations contained in Ms. Bertini's report and urged the parties to recognize and act upon their respective responsibilities. In particular, it urged Israel to take measures to improve the lives of Palestinians, by, inter alia, allowing the resumption of normal economic activity, facilitating the movement of goods, people and essential services and lifting curfews and closures. In addition, the members of the Quartet agreed that Israel must ensure full, safe and unfettered access for international and humanitarian personnel.

11. The growing humanitarian needs of the Palestinian population must be met. At the same time, in doing so the international community should not lessen its efforts to revive a sustainable peace process. It cannot be overemphasized that there is no military solution to this conflict. The realization of legitimate Palestinian national aspirations and genuine security for Israel can only be achieved through compromise and a negotiated settlement. The road map being set out by the Quartet offers a way forward (see para. 14 below).

12. Over the past year, the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, has been the subject of extensive consultations and debates in the Security Council. Since January 2002, regular briefings have been held in order to update the Council on the latest developments in the Middle East. Five new resolutions were adopted by the Security Council, in particular resolution 1397 (2002), affirming the Council's vision of a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, would live side by side within secure and recognized borders. This vision of a two-State solution has gained universal support in the international community.

13. It is a matter of particular regret to me that so little remains of the mutual trust that had been so painstakingly built between the parties. Regular and consistent third-party involvement and encouragement is needed to help them find a way out of the current vicious cycle of destruction. To this end, I personally and my

representatives in the region have continued to devote a great deal of attention to this issue. I have maintained close and regular contacts with the parties and other leaders in the region and the international community to try to find a way forward.

14. As part of this effort, the United Nations, the United States, the Russian Federation and the European Union came together to form a new coordinating mechanism for international peace efforts known as the Quartet. The Quartet met for the first time at the principals' level at United Nations Headquarters in New York in November 2001. At a principals' meeting in Madrid in April 2002, the Quartet called for a three-pronged approach to address comprehensively security, economic and political concerns. In May 2002, in Washington, D.C., the Quartet announced its intention to work with the parties to hold an international peace conference focused on attaining the two-State goal set forth in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002). In July 2002, in New York, the Quartet agreed to pursue the following goals: two democratic States living side by side in peace and security; a complete and lasting halt to violence and terrorism; an end to the occupation that began in 1967; a halt to settlements; reform of the Palestinian Authority's security and civilian institutions; the holding of Palestinian elections; and the conclusion of permanent settlement negotiations on the outstanding issues within three years. In September 2002, the Quartet agreed on a three-year, three-phase implementation road map to achieve a comprehensive settlement. Progress would be based on compliance with specific performance benchmarks to be monitored and assessed by the Quartet. The details of that road map are being worked out. In this context, I am very encouraged by the growing involvement of the parties and neighbouring Arab States in a direct dialogue with the Quartet.

15. In March 2002, the Summit of the League of Arab States unanimously adopted — as the Arab Peace Initiative — the plan proposed by Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia calling for full Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied since June 1967 and for Israel's acceptance of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, in return for the establishment of normal relations with the Arab countries in the context of a comprehensive peace with Israel. This initiative introduced a new and important element in the search for a lasting political solution: the collective political commitment of the Arab world to long-term peace with Israel. The Arab Peace Initiative will remain a crucial element in future peace efforts.

16. As the General Assembly has underscored on many occasions, the achievement of a final and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine — the core issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict — is imperative for the attainment of a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. I hope that there will also be movement on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks so that peace, security and stability will be achieved for all people in the region on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). It is my considered view that our common vision for a truly comprehensive peace can only be realized if all concerned, namely the parties, the key regional players, and the wider international community, live up to their respective responsibilities and work together to make it possible.

17. For its part, the United Nations will continue to support the resumption of a meaningful peace process and will remain at the forefront of efforts to alleviate the severe economic and social hardships of the Palestinian people. I call on the international community to provide the necessary resources in support of United

Nations programmes to address the deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people, and especially to provide adequate funding for UNRWA so that it can continue to deliver the necessary services to Palestinian refugees. Donor assistance is especially crucial at a time when the humanitarian situation is so critical.

18. I should like to pay special tribute to Terje Roed-Larsen, United Nations Special Coordinator and my Personal Representative, and to the staff of the Office of the Special Coordinator, as well as to Peter Hansen, Commissioner-General of UNRWA and the staff of that Agency and all other United Nations agencies, who have rendered sterling service while working under the most demanding and difficult circumstances.